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ABSTRACT

Qualified recreation professionals are abundant, particularly for administrative positions. However, many trained professionals have White, middle-class backgrounds which sometimes limit their understanding of the needs of low-income and minority neighborhoods. Blacks, women, and minorities can improve this situation if they can overcome economic and educational problems. They should look for employment in the commercial, industrial, private, voluntary, and religious sectors of recreation. Minority recreators must assume a greater responsibility for the quality of leisure services they provide. Good recreational planning will reduce the occurrence of crime as a leisure activity. Minority recreators must be prepared to meet future social and community needs. (CJ)

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"THE FUTURE OF BLACKS IN THE RECREATION PROFESSION"

a presentation at
The 1980 AAHPERD National Convention
AALR Session
Black and Minority Involvement in Recreation
Detroit, Michigan
April 14, 1980
by
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The Future! When does it begin? Does it begin tomorrow? Next Week? Or, next year? I suggest to you that, for Blacks in the recreation profession, it began long ago.

It had its stirrings in early America with the severing of our various cultural ties to our native land. Its first retarded steps were taken in a slave-based society that denied our humanness. Tentative, probing movement began during the periods of emancipation and reconstruction as some of our ancestors trickled northward.

After festering in squalid conditions in the urban North and rural South, our "past future" glimpsed a dawning new day with the creation of the Boston Sand Gardens in 1885. It stood upright briefly on the shoulders of Ernest T. Attwell in his work with the National Recreation Association's Bureau of Colored Works. Following that period, it essentially languished in a segregated society until it burst forth in violence with the riots of the sixties.

An array of governmental programs impacted our recreational future and lulled some in our ranks with a false sense of change. Various agencies and professional organizations united in their efforts to respond to minority needs and future concerns through a reordering of priorities. And, while economic limitations and the continuing struggle for professionalism appear to now possibly limit this response, that unification helped to bring us to our "present future" and it allows us to give consideration to our "future future." (1, 2)

The past future shaped our lives and thinking for the present future, but before we look at it, let me quickly give you a view of our present status. I hope that it coincides somewhat with Mr. Anderson's assessment. Some of the available reports give the following indications regarding staffing and employment of minorities.

The 1978 National Urban Recreation Study states that:

> Qualified recreation professionals are abundant, particularly for administrative positions. However, many trained professionals have white, middle-class backgrounds which sometimes limit their understanding of the needs of low-income and minority neighborhoods. (3)

A report on leisure service leadership, prepared by Dr. Donald Henkel of

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the National Recreation and Park Association and presented by David Laidlaw at the first world conference on leadership for leisure, probably best documents where we are today. It reports that:

> . . . the number of available college graduates now exceeds the demand for the employment of such graduates.
>
> - The faculty (of recreation curricula) are white/male dominated.
>
> . . . state park systems were . . . less likely to hire women and minorities.
>
> - Women and minorities are notably absent from positions of power. Both groups are more heavily represented in positions dealing with leadership and supervision. (4)

It's not all dismal however. Affirmative action pressures are forcing agencies and institutions to recruit minorities more actively. So the present future looks a little brighter.

I see indications of Blacks entering doctoral programs in colleges and universities. As major cities achieve higher black populations, minorities and women are slowly moving into administrative roles. Using Michigan as an example, we can see attempts to correct existing problems.

> To increase the number of blacks and other minorities in top-level positions, the Governor has directed department directors to submit to him the names of job candidates for administrative posts for his approval.
>
> The Department of Natural Resources has also started to recruit for technical positions from southern black schools - where enrollments in the sciences are higher.
>
> Michigan colleges and universities have also been more responsive to the needs of minority students. Special admissions programs for the educationally disadvantaged have permitted many students to attend Michigan colleges and universities. . . . (5)

In my role as a department chairperson, I see some problems in our educational system for our present future. We have a long way to go in meeting the needs of such students. Not only do we have to work with our related academic faculty to develop higher levels of empathy and understanding for student problems and needs, we must do a better job of working with faculty in departments providing required general and professional educa-

tion courses which support our curricula. We also have to establish closer working relationships with the elementary and secondary schools so that they can better prepare students for entry into our programs.

The operating agencies themselves are in need of assistance also. They have a responsibility to improve the quality of their services and to up-grade employees through in-service training programs and opportunities for continuing education. Our publics cannot afford the position taken by some public agencies that they:

> . . . recognize the need for training to allow personnel to continue to develop their professional expertise as people's needs change, but view it as an unaffordable luxury; (where) training is usually provided informally and on-the-job. (6)

Another very real world-of-work problem being faced by Blacks and other minorities is based in the continuing economic squeeze. As our fiscal resources become constricted, the threat of unemployment hangs over our heads. The old axiom "last hired, first fired" still obtains in most agencies. Such an eventuality will be hurtful to the professionals and to our publics. And I suspect that most of you recognize that this condition holds true for our educational institutions also.

The economic crisis also holds a possible threat for minority students. Colleges and universities are faced with the need to raise tuitions to meet escalating costs. Minority and marginal students stand to be negatively affected by such increases. And, while it is purely conjecture on my part, I hold that Blacks are slowly being priced out of the central core of our cities. The "Comeback for our Cities . . ." reported in the March 24th U.S. News and World Report indicates a shifting balance of power and wealth in many metropolitan areas across the country. (7) Blacks have already felt the effects of urban "removal." We may soon have to face the impact of the urban renaissance and a possible future shift in agency employment practices.

While I won't delve too deeply into them, the issues of accreditation and professional certification may well present us with new career concerns for our present future. The issues cannot be taken lightly for they may well erect new barriers to assessing the educational and employment systems.

On a similar note, I suggest that we need to look long and carefully at our educational systems turning out professionals with too narrow a view of their present future roles. I remember reading somewhere that young people entering the work force today can look forward to having seven different career changes in their future. Black students will have to prepare themselves for this demand for flexibility and for increasing interdisciplinary service programs.

We must begin to shift our emphasis from the public sectors for future employment. The commercial, industrial, private, voluntary, and reli-

gious sectors of recreation should receive increased attention. "Service Industries: Growth Field of the 80's," an article in the March 17th U.S. News and World Report, forcasts that there will be a growth of 1,010,000 jobs in the amusements and recreation services by 1990. (8) Just as we did in the past, Blacks will have to carve out a niche in these service areas for their present future.

We must prepare ourselves to function in the present and future leisure environments of underwater parks, theme parks, hospices, indoor parks, high-rise amusement centers, and underground facilities. Twenty-four hour leisure centers, co-ed correctional facilities, specialty camps, employee recreation facilities, international tourism and adventure/risk programs are just a few of the numerous areas for us to consider. The same applies to leisure counseling and leisure education as they become a part of our industry.

Before leaving this consideration of our present future, let me make one more point. Black recreators must assume a greater responsibility for the quality of leisure services they provide for their constituents and for the leisure attitudes they engender in their professional capacities. Our black communities cannot afford the luxury of only limited, "fun and games" activity-oriented recreation programs. Detroit has recognized this and is moving to turn some of its recreation centers into multi-service community centers. The department's recreation professionals are being re-trained to fill new management and service roles. Detroit's present future is looking good in some ways. The very presence of our conference here these few days is, in part, testimony to that appearance.

What are the future future possibilities for Black recreators?

Perhaps your immediate reaction is--why worry about it? Why waste time considering possible conditions of a far-distant time? We can't even resolve the problems of today--less long those of a future future tomorrow. Well, the answer, to my way of thinking, ought to be obvious.

You, each and every one of you, are and will be a very important factor in that future. You, in your individual and collective role, are shaping that future by what you are doing each and every present day. You are now shaping the values and behaviors of our personal present and future futures. And, if you harken back to my opening comments, you may understand that you will be a basic part of the past future for those living and serving in the future future. How they function may well depend on the legacies you offer them today.

I sincerely hope that you truly understand just how important you are to society. We've always been more than "jocks" seeking to develop super athletes. We've failed to stand up and tell the rest of the world what we are really all about. Sometimes it appears to me that we in our professions don't completely understand how important we really are.

For a number of years I have tried to impress upon people the relationship of the inappropriate use of leisure time and the many social ills facing us. For those of you who haven't heard it before, consider the time of

occurrence for the following human activities: drug use, child abuse, spouse abuse, suicide, murder, crime, adultry, juvenile delinquency, teen-age pregnancies, and on and on. Their time of occurrence is essentially during the leisure--potential hours. Joseph Curtis has elaborated on the subject in terms of "purple recreation." (9)

If the predictions about the future abundance of leisure time are correct, then Black and other minority recreation professionals will have their work cut out for them. For, unless we educate them for leisure living, the minorities and disadvantaged will be least equipped to cope with extensive leisure time. Discussing an holistic approach to leisure services, Murphy and Howard suggest that some agencies have already adopted additional approaches to service delivery--such as facilitator or enabler roles where coordination, referral and assistance in technical matters are assumed. (10)

The future future should see us involved in more exotic roles. Leisure entrepreneurs will increase to meet leisure demands. Space recreators most assuredly will emerge as we colonize outer space. Back here on earth we may see the development of sport and leisure megastructures providing a wide variety of leisure opportunities on several levels, all under one roof. Since most homes by then will be self-contained entertainment/education/work centers, recreators will have to devise facilities to draw people out of their holistic leisure cocoons. Human life may be extended to 200 years or more. Human labor will be virtually obsolete as machines take over the various work tasks.

That's my scenario for the future future. Other possible scenarios have been depicted that suggest that life will be much more severe than I have pictured it. In either case, I contend that we can't just let things happen. We should begin planning for the future future today. Black recreators must be a part of that planning process. The late John McHale stated his belief almost ten years ago when he said:

> Ours is possibly one of the most critical periods in human experience, poised in the transition between one kind of world and another, we are literally on the hinge of a great transformation in the whole human condition.
>
> The next fifty years may be the most crucial in all of man's history. We have few guides to follow and almost no usable precedents . . .
>
> The immediate and most necessary task is the exploration and methodical investigation of all avenues and approaches to the future. These range from re-evaluation of the past, to the study of human trends and needs in the present, to the projection, forecasting, and imaginative construction of a plurality of individual and social futures. (11)

His statement should serve as a challenge to us today. We must not be satisfied with the status quo. Black professionals in particular must become advocates for positive change. We must push for the planning process as detailed by McHale. V. Hap Smith, writing in the Special Minorities Issue of Parks and Recreation, told us why. He said:

> . . . The hierarchy in our profession, as well as in many other fields of endeavor, tends to be manned exclusively by a WASP faction which tends to recycle and regenerate its own kind with little more than token consideration for the inclusion of minority members in the group. These factions tend to develop principles, practices, and postures which totally mitigate the interest and motivation of most minorities, particularly blacks, who are operating only at service levels in the systems. We see this type of situation in the political arena, in academia, and at community and neighborhood levels within our cities. Those of us who are black remain somewhat in a quandry with respect to how we may deal with the monolithic structures which work against our cause. At some point there must be a breakthrough which is related to a technique or method of intervention other than those we have seen, e.g., protest in the streets, intent to destroy the entire system, and the lack of any action at all, which we observe as general frustration or total apathy. (12)

Future planning may not be the total answer to Hap's call for a different method of intervention, but is one that must be employed and refined if we are to work toward a resolution of our leisure-related problems. More jobs is not the total solution as some would have us believe. Most of the really big crooks now hold or held "jobs" during their criminal activities.

To my way of thinking recreation, for most Blacks and minorities, has long been a matter of survival. If we expect to survive and have a professional future in recreation, then we had better become a little less satisfied with the limited possibilities of our present future and more concerned about our future futures. Others are about the business of looking out for theirs. We can afford to do no less. We are a part of the system. I for one intend to do all I can to ensure that Blacks have a say in where the system takes us. I urge you to do the same.

We must begin planning for our future future today. I suggest it for somewhat selfish reasons. My future depends, in part, on what you do. I hope that you won't let me down.

Thank you!

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2. The terms "past future," "present future," and "future future" are based on the writing of John McHale, The Future of Future. New York: Ballentine Books, 1969.

3. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Urban Recreation Study Executive Report. Washington, D.C., February, 1978, p. 72.

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8. "Service Industries: Growth Field of '80's," U.S. News and World Report, March 17, 1980, pp. 80-83.

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12. V. Hap Smith, "A Black Man's Concept of Leisure in America," Parks and Recreation, April 1975, pp. 19-20.